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the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by Environment Action Association, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2012/1.

Statement

Roles of non-governmental organizations in poverty eradication: approaches for water scarcity problems

Introduction

Water scarcity is increasing and 30 countries, mainly in Africa and the Middle East, are facing water deficits. The United Nations has underscored that, at the current rate of consumption, two out of three people will be living in water-stressed situations by 2025. Globally, the problem is becoming severe as populations increase, and the consumption of water for industry, agriculture and households also increases. Water shortage problems entail water-borne diseases and hinder economic and agricultural development. Overall, local, national and regional water-related problems have an effect on the rest of the world by deepening world poverty.

In this regard, special attention to adopt an interdisciplinary approach at the local, national, regional and international levels is necessary to eradicate the world poverty incurred by water shortage problems. This statement will focus on grass-roots participation by highlighting the approaches used by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in attempting to address the ongoing poverty incurred by water scarcity problems in developing countries.

Issues and problems

Water is essential to human life and is needed for drinking, cooking, cleaning, bathing, washing clothes and irrigating crops. As population growth, urbanization, the industrial use of water and the use of agricultural chemicals increase, water resources are becoming scarce. According to the *Human Development Report 2006*, some 1.1 billion people in developing countries have inadequate access to water and 2.6 billion people lack basic sanitation. Furthermore, limited access to water is closely related to poverty. Almost two in three people lacking access to clean water survive on less than \$2 a day, with one in three living on less than \$1 a day. More than 660 million people without sanitation live on less than \$2 a day, and more than 385 million on less than \$1 a day. Janet Henshall Momsen points out in *Gender and Development* (Routledge Perspectives on Development) that as millions of people spend several hours a day collecting water, less time is available for other household chores such as childcare, cleaning and cooking. In addition, according to the United Nations Environment Programme, every year over 2 million people, mainly children, die from diarrhoea due to contaminated water and lack of sanitation, and 5 million deaths are caused by water-borne diseases.

Approaches/challenges

In order to eradicate the root causes of poverty, partnership between Governments, NGOs and civil society based on human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability is crucial.

Well project of Environment Action Association

The Environment Action Association (EAA) visits many African and South-East Asian countries to conduct a well project to improve sanitation by, collaboratively with local governments, installing wells in those countries after prioritizing the

villages with severe problems. In July 2011, EAA installed a total of four wells in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, two for Poosankam village, one for Ponsai village and another for Napo village. The first place visited was Poosankam, where some of the local people are being forced out of their homes by expansion of the airport. Some of them have no access to safe drinking water while living in tents. Many local people spend thousands of hours collecting and carrying water. EAA installed wells in the Lao People's Democratic Republic during the rainy season, when the water supply is relatively good. However, the water supply decreases during the dry season, when many places, rivers and springs may dry up and the search for water becomes even more difficult and contamination more likely. Additionally, as Janet Henshall Momsen also points out in *Gender and Development*, irrigation schemes where water stands in ponds may increase the prevalence of mosquito-borne diseases, such as malaria, yellow fever and dengue fever.

Recommendations for efforts by NGOs to solve water scarcity problems can be suggested in the following six cross-cutting areas.

Approach 1. NGOs as representative of civil society

The National Water Policy of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 2002, put emphasis on change from a Government-driven approach to a demand-driven approach, whereby communities are involved in the planning and management of water issues, as well as in cost recovery; in this regard, NGOs emerge as representatives or key actors of the private sector, according to Mashuhuri Mwinyihamisi in *The Role of NGOs in Integrated Water Resources Management: Resolving Water Conflict*, 2009.

Approach 2. NGOs as facilitators

NGOs facilitate the process of community participation, such as in the planning and construction of dams, wells and irrigation schemes (Mashuhuri, 2009).

NGOs facilitate the empowerment of the local community and social partners, by supporting the voiceless to speak for themselves (ibid.).

Approach 3. NGOs as trainers

NGOs have the role of trainers as they assist in the transfer of technical skills, knowledge and practices to the local people to install and protect wells.

Approach 4. NGOs as advocates

NGOs, as neutral non-partisan actors, strengthen citizens' capacity as decision makers and build more accountable and equitable Government legislation to increase community participation (VeneKlasen and Miller, *World Neighbours*, 2002).

Approach 5. NGOs as watchdogs

NGOs have a substantial role to play in identifying, assessing and monitoring Government policy and pointing out the shortcomings of the implementation process or of the policy itself.

Approach 6. NGOs as educators

NGOs promote local community awareness by incorporating innovation, knowledge and education into water management.

NGOs provide community-centred training programmes, promoting local capacities in order to manage and cope with water scarcity problems.

NGOs additionally provide easily understandable information on water-borne diseases for school curricula in formal and informal education, particularly for children living in poverty.

Challenges for NGOs with regard to water scarcity

- Funding is the crucial challenge in addressing water shortage in developing countries.
- Cooperation from water resource stakeholders and Government institutions.
- Most trainers dispatched by NGOs are lacking in expertise and experience to fulfil all the tasks they encounter.

Conclusion

Water shortage adversely affects future advances in poverty alleviation. In order to eradicate world poverty incurred by the water scarcity problems, special approaches must be taken in implementing policy and developing technology suitable for adoption by people living in water shortage areas (Mashuhuri, 2009).

A greater role for NGOs as representatives of civil society is needed for building various approaches in collaboration with Government institutions and making sure that water users also have rights and obligations with regard to policy related to the water sector (ibid.).

Furthermore, as pointed out in the Chair's summary on the priority theme, poverty eradication, at the forty-ninth session of the Commission for Social Development, Governments and NGOs as representatives of civil society should strive to create a multilateral system to increase international commitment to poverty eradication by taking public and solidarity-based action and implementing policies that eliminate discrimination and social barriers among people living in poverty.